Photoshop Tips & Tricks

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1. Having problems moving the curser in a straight line? When using any paintbrush, airbrush, eraser, rubber stamp, or smudge tool, after first clicking on your image with the tool, if you hold down the Shift key as you click with your tool at a second spot, your tool will move in a straight line.

2. Need to select a circle but don't know where to start? Bring guides down from the rulers at the top and left side into play. Click on the top ruler with the mouse, hold and drag the guide down until it meets with the edge of the round shape you need to select. Do the same with the guide from the left. Now select the circle marquee tool (M), place your curser at the junction of the two guides, and drag down to match the circular shape in the image. If you need to transform your selection (rotate, skew, distort, etc.), go to Selection > Transform Selection to transform the selection without cutting it from the image.

3. Having a problem finding the exact center of a selection? If you already have the selection active, use Transform (Command – T) to show you the centers. The transform guides have marks at each corner AND exactly along the center of each length. Drag a guide from the rulers over onto this transform selection and place the guides in the center of the midway markers. Then simply hit the Enter key to apply the transformation. (If you accidentally moved anything, you can undo the transformation by typing Command – Z.) Your new guides are still in place and their intersection is the exact center of that earlier selection.

4. Need to select a complex part of an image? Follow these steps with a new image: Duplicate your Background layer (Command - J) and add a white layer between the duplicated image and Background layers. Select your white layer (2) and set its Layer Opacity at 20 – 50%. Select Layer 1 (the duplicated image) as your active layer. At the bottom of the Layer palette, select the second icon from the left (Add Layer Mask). Note that an icon now appears to the right of the icon on Layer 1. This new icon is the mask that resides on the layer, not the image itself that is on the layer. Click on that new icon. The mask is simple: wherever the mask is black, whatever resides visibly below that layer will be displayed. Where the mask stays white, the image on that layer will be displayed whenever that layer is visible (unless blocked by a visible layer above it.) You can use any brush or filter that works on black and white images, but not color effects. That means you cannot apply a color tint or embossing effect, but you can use a paintbrush, eraser, blur, feathering, gradients, and many more tools and effects. Now by simply selecting the mask icon, you can paint out your unwanted parts of a layer. You can easily see the edges of your mask (selection), thanks to the white layer. When you are done making your selection, you can delete or simply turn off the white layer.

5. If you want to see just the mask without the image on that layer, just click on the mask while holding down the Option key. To show the image without the mask, click on the mask while holding down the Shift key. You can turn it back on by repeating the mouse-keystroke.

6. If you want to use that selection you just made as more than a mask, simply hold down the Command key when you click once on the layer mask. As with any layer, this will select the contents of the mask. You can then use that selection on any other layer, or another layer's mask, to speed up your workflow.

7. Having trouble color balancing your image? With the image open, select the Eyedropper tool and go to the top menu bar. Next to the eyedropper icon at the top, set the Sample Size to 5 x 5 Average. Now open the Levels palette (Command – L). Select the middle eyedropper tool at the lower right. Now click on various parts of your image that you think should have a neutral gray tone (asphalt, concrete, car tires, silver paint, etc.) Once your image colors are in the ballpark, you can make adjustments using the individual channels (under RGB in the Channel selector at the top of the Levels palette.)

8. When using the Levels, Hue & Saturation, or other similar windows: If you are unhappy with the settings you've entered, simply hold down the Option key to turn the Cancel button into a Reset button. This avoids having to hit Cancel and then reopen the palette to start fresh.

9. Do your images have weak blacks or a poor tonal range? Again, in the Levels palette, look at the triangles at the bottom of the histogram graph. Do the triangles at the extreme right and left line up with the graph? If not, try moving the triangle to better match the graph. Use the middle triangle to set the basic density of the image.

10. Need to edit a layer that extends beyond your canvas? Just click on the layer, type Command – T to transform, then Command – 0 (zero) to show the extreme boundaries of the object on that layer. Now that the transformation handles of the layer are visible, it's easy to grab a handle to resize it. Hold the Shift key down while you move a handle will maintain the height and width proportions.

11. Need to quickly rotate, resize or move an object? Select the object or layer, and type Command – T to transform. Now move the curser outboard of a corner until you see the curser take a bent shape. Now you can rotate the selection freely. You can also move the object by putting the curser inside of the transformation selection and click, holding and dragging. To resize the selection proportionately, just hold down the Shift key while dragging a corner to the new size. The selection will not keep its height / width relationship if you do not hold down the Shift key.

12. Want to apply an effect but don't understand the mode to use? (At the top of the Layer palette, or in the Styles palette.) The quick explanation for the most common

layer modes is to use Multiply to darken, Screen to lighten, and Normal to behave predictably. Don't hesitate to change the Opacity of a layer (the % box at the top of the Layer palette) to get the effect you want.

13. Want to apply a Layer Style to a Text Layer? Double-clicking on the Text layer selects all the text on that layer, but doesn't open up the Styles palette as it would with a rasterized layer. (A layer that has been "rasterized" is one that is made up from pixels. In Photoshop 7, text layers are vector layers. This means they can be edited and resized without losing their crisp edge sharpness.) To apply a Style to a Text layer, select the layer. At the bottom of the Layer palette, select the icon on the far left, the dark circle with "f" in the middle. Picking any of the options listed will open the Styles palette where you can make a new style or choose from any previously defined style. Note that the text is still fully editable.

14. Learn some keyboard shortcuts to speed up your workflow.
    a. M is for Marquee, the rectangle or circle selection tool
    b. V is your Move tool
    c. C is to Crop
    d. L is the Lasso tool, used for selecting by following an edge
    e. W is the Magic Wand, a freeform selection tool that looks for "like" pixels
    f. H is the Healing Brush, a step beyond the Rubber Stamp for retouching
    g. B is your Paintbrush
    h. E is the Eraser
    i. T is for Text
    j. X swaps the foreground and background colors
    k. [or] to temporarily reduce or enlarge a brush's size
    l. "Tab" key to hide all palettes
    m. "Tab ff" makes a full screen slide show
    n. If your tool choice has different options (like a circle or a rectangle in the Marquee tool), just hold down the Shift key when typing the tool keystroke shortcut to pick from those options.
    o. Command-J will duplicate any selected layer.
    p. Hold down the Command key as you click on any layer will select all the pixels or text on a layer.
    q. When working in Hue & Saturation, Levels and other palettes, holding down the Option key will change the Cancel button to Reset, allowing you to start fresh without having to Cancel and then re-open the palette.

15. Zooming is fast when you type "Z", then hold the Control key down while the magnifying glass on your image. Pick the view you want, or be selective by moving the sliding triangle under the thumbnail image in the Navigator.

16. When cropping, if you have your cropping selection sized just right but the cropping box isn't exactly where you want it? Just put your curser inside the cropped selection box, then click, hold, and drag the box to a better place in your image. Once you are

happy with your cropping, hit the Enter key to execute the crop. If you have made an error along the way, the quickest method to undo it is to apply the cropping (Enter key), and then Undo (Command – Z) to return to the previous. (Using the History palette, recent actions, including cropping, can be undone.)

17. To adjust the saturation, brightness and hue of a layer, type Command-U. To instantly remove all color from a layer, Command-Shift-U. (Don't forget that you can use the Option key to change the Cancel button into a Reset button in this window.)

18. When pasting a selection, often there is an "edge" on the selection that makes it very obvious that it is pasted. You can minimize that trait by doing this: On the new layer, hold down the Command key while clicking on the pasted layer. This will select all of the contents of that layer. Now type Command – H to hide the "marching ants" from view. (Your selection is still active, but is no longer highlighted by the dotted line boundaries.) Now go to Layers / Matting / Defringe. Select the number of pixels you think need to be modified. You can do trial and error by guessing and applying that change, and undoing that if it is not to your satisfaction. Then try again.

19. Looking for a source for some great visual effects and tutorials? Go to the Adobe Studio at http://studio.adobe.com. There, you will find tutorials and the Adobe Studio Exchange where you can download enhancements for Adobe products. You need to log in but becoming a member is free. You will also find some excellent sources for tutorials as well as resources for Illustrator, GoLive, InDesign and more.

20. For the ultimate Photoshop support, check out http://www.photoshopuser.com, the website for the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. The yearly membership is $99, well worth it if you make your living with Photoshop. The extent of resources and learning opportunities is truly excellent, possibly even better than Adobe's own website's offerings.